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# British spy agencies enmeshed in allegations that would outpace a thriller

By Gilbert A. Lewthwaite  
London Bureau of The Sun

LONDON — A secret-service attempt to oust the British prime minister . . . a plot to kill and discredit a leading politician . . . a spy-catcher who was homosexual . . . a spy-master who was a Soviet agent.

The ingredients appear too rich for even the most imaginative espionage thriller. But the real world can sometimes seem stranger than fiction.

The headlines in the British press these days are full of allegations of the most bizarre cloak-and-dagger exploits by Britain's vaunted security

agencies, MI-5 and MI-6.

MI-5 is the domestic intelligence agency charged with defending the nation's secrets. MI-6 is in the business of active espionage to uncover what other nations do not want the British to know. The two agencies operate without legislative oversight.

If recent allegations are correct, it would seem, at least in the not-too-distant past, that the agencies exceeded their mandates extraordinarily.

Consider:

□ Three daily newspapers are facing prosecution for contempt of court, having decided to defy a legal ban on printing revelations of an alleged MI-5 coup attempt against

Prime Minister Harold Wilson in the 1970s.

□ MI-5 was reportedly at the heart of one of the greatest British political scandals of this century: the 1963 Profumo Affair.

According to a new book, "Affair of State," MI-5 recruited a central figure in the scandal, Stephen Ward, to set up a sexual trap for Soviet defense attache Eugene Ivanov, using call-girl Christine Keeler as the "bait."

Mr. Ward, a fashionable London osteopath at the time, also arranged a liaison between Ms. Keeler and the British secretary of war, John Profumo.

When the Anglo-Soviet joint dalliance was revealed, Mr. Profumo resigned from Parliament after initially denying it. Captain Ivanov returned to Moscow, and Mr. Ward committed suicide while on trial for living off immoral earnings. The new book al-

leges that MI-5 remained silent about its role in the scandal while Mr. Ward was "framed as an establishment scapegoat."

□ MI-5 also stands accused by the Rev. Ian Paisley, fire-and-brimstone-breathing Ulster loyalist, of seeking both to kill and discredit him.

□ Another member of Parliament, left-winger Tony Benn, has charged that MI-5 planned to kill him in the 1970s, when Labor was in power. He said an attempt was also made to embroil him in a homosexual smear campaign against Conservative Prime Minister Edward Heath, a bachelor.

□ The former boss of Britain's domestic intelligence service, Sir Roger Hollis, has posthumously been labeled a Soviet agent in a book by one of his former agents, Peter Wright.

□ And Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher has confirmed that Sir Maurice Oldfield, the head of MI-6 in 1973-1978, had homosexual preferences, although there is no evidence that this compromised his security operations.

If additional piquancy is needed, it should be noted that Sir Maurice is believed to have been no less than the model for novelist John Le-Carre's archetypal spy-master, George Smiley.

Mrs. Thatcher is resisting calls for an investigation into MI-5's activities, particularly during the 1970s government of Harold Wilson.

Mr. Wilson, according to assertions by former MI-5 agent Peter Wright in a so-far unpublished book, "Spycatcher," was viewed by a group of MI-5 agents as being dangerously left-wing and too closely involved with Moscow.

The attempt to discredit Mr. Wilson and destabilize his government was reportedly instigated after MI-5 conducted an investigation of him at the instigation of James Angleton, counterintelligence head of the CIA.

It was Sir Maurice Oldfield, then head of MI-6, who urged Mr. Wright to report the suspected plot, apparently the work of a group of right-wing officers, to his MI-5 superiors.

According to Mr. Wright's account, the MI-5 superior to whom he reported his suspicions was at first aghast, then angry against MI-6's Sir Maurice "for poking his nose into our business," and finally demanded to know the names of the conspirators, explaining: "I need them to protect them, Peter."

The furor over these allegations, has provided Mr. Paisley, the Ulster loyalist, with an opportunity to renew his claim that the British Secret Service planned to assassinate him and then discredit him by producing forged documents to show he had invested loyalist funds for his personal benefit abroad.

Mrs. Thatcher's response to the explosion of allegations of illegality and incompetence against the intelligence community has been to say it all happened before she moved into 10 Downing Street in 1979.

This has not satisfied many observers.

The *Independent*, one of the three papers facing legal action for publishing Mr. Wright's allegations, has demanded the establishment of an oversight body in line with the supervision sanctioned in the United States, West Germany, Australia and Canada.

"Both the intention and the effect would be to make our security and intelligence services more, rather than less effective. . . . It is a matter of vital national interest that the government should quickly overcome objections which are increasingly and transparently feeble."

Geoffrey Smith, political commentator for *The Times*, has warned Mrs. Thatcher that by refusing to order an investigation into MI-5's mid-1970s activities she is risking an unnecessary political embarrassment — particularly in advance of the general election she is expected to call next month.

He wrote last week: "Is she once again demonstrating that she has a curious insensitivity to constitutional niceties? Is she unable to understand that these things do matter? Or is she simply being stubborn?"